



DEPARTMENT OF THE ARMY
FORT DETRICK
FREDERICK, MARYLAND 21701

MAY 6 1968

IN REPLY REFER TO:

SMUFD-TD

3 May 1968

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
Department of Genetics
Stanford University
School of Medicine
Palo Alto, California 94304

Dear Josh:

Writing rebuttals to journalists is not ordinarily a rewarding pursuit but I want to make an exception on the present occasion because of my respect for you as a scientist and my anticipation that you would want to be accurately informed.

I refer to your article entitled, "Congress Should Examine Biological Warfare Tests" that appeared in the 30 March 1968 issue of the Washington Post. This headline and the contents of the first several paragraphs lead the reader to believe that your remarks are directed to the problems associated with large-scale, field testing of biological agents and weapons. Your subsequent remarks refer to "... competence of the men responsible for research", and to "... infections contracted by workers in medical laboratories." As a result of these and other similar remarks in the last half of your column, the reader is now led to believe that your comments and criticisms apply equally to the conduct of laboratory research and to field testing, as these activities relate to BW. The major portion of my professional career has been devoted to just such laboratory research at Fort Detrick and it is my belief, therefore, that I can speak on this topic with the assurance that comes from many years of experience. The remainder of this letter is, therefore, devoted to my comments about the views expressed in your column as these apply to our research laboratory.

First, with regard to your question about the technical competence of the men responsible for the research. Our staff has published over 1300 papers in scientific journals; have spoken on hundreds, if not thousands, of occasions at scientific meetings, symposia, and university seminars; and have served in a variety of scientific and professional capacities such as members of editorial boards of journals and officers of societies. There is ample basis for judging the scientific competence of these individuals

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and it is the identical basis used for formulating such judgments in universities. Incidentally, an independent and most valuable source of informed evaluation of our scientific staff has been the ASM Committee Advisory to Fort Detrick. Regrettably, there are some microbiologists who do not realize this.

Now for your remarks about nonchalance or indifference to safety. You state that you have no way of knowing the completeness with which laboratory-acquired infections are reported from military research laboratories. I can assure you that these have been reported, without reservation, by Fort Detrick. For example, in 1965 Fort Detrick sent a tabulation of 398 cases of laboratory-acquired infections with two deaths to the American Public Health Association's Committee on Laboratory Infections and to the American Arbovirus Committee. This tabulation included all hospitalized, non-hospitalized, and sub-clinical (only serological evidence of infection) cases from the opening of the installation in 1943 to August 1964. Detailed studies have been made and reported on the causal factors involved in these situations. In addition, for over ten years Fort Detrick supported a medical investigative group at the Department of Medicine of Johns Hopkins who, under the leadership of Leighton E. Cluff, conducted a comprehensive series of studies on most of these cases. These studies have been presented before appropriate medical societies and published in medical journals.

Fort Detrick has devoted more effort, time, personnel, and money to investigating its actual and potential laboratory-acquired illnesses and those of other laboratories throughout the world than any other organization I know of. We have been completely open in our detailed reporting of such illnesses, and have done more to investigate, develop, and report the hazards and means of prevention of laboratory-acquired infection than any other organization in the world.

The information we have derived regarding the hazards in microbiological laboratories and means for eliminating or controlling them has found widespread use in the design of buildings for hospitals, pharmaceutical research firms, medical schools, the National Institutes of Health and the National Aeronautics and Space Agency. Ironically, we have been criticized in past years for taking excessive safety measures in our laboratories.

I haven't burdened you by sending documentation to support my remarks; however, let me assure you that I will be pleased to provide appropriate literature references on any of the topics discussed in this letter, should you desire them.

Sincerely yours,



RILEY D. HOUSEWRIGHT
Technical Director